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THE STRATEGIES OF FASHION BRANDS – BRAND STRETCHING

ABSTRACT

Combining the brands of a famous fashion designer with a product which seemingly does not require such an additional “label” has already become a trend in highly developed countries. Today’s consumers are looking for the confirmation or possibility of shaping their identity and making their dreams come true. The fashion market in Poland is still developing, which is evidenced by a strong position of Polish clothing chain brands and the significance attached to fashion in social media. According to consumers, the use of fashion brands in other industries is a right way forward since it makes the process of making purchasing decisions easier.

The objective of this paper is to touch upon the issues related to the use of fashion brands in other industries as well as to attempt to provide an answer to the question concerning the influence of this phenomenon on the image of furnishings brands. This article has been prepared on the basis of literature studies and a case study analysis. The conclusions presented herein are also the outcome of the author’s own studies and the observations of the analysed markets.

Key words: *fashion, brand extension, interior design, trends*

Introduction

For quite a long time, in many western markets, we have been observing the phenomenon of using and combining fashion brands with the brands functioning in other industries. This phenomenon has only recently been observed in Poland, too. Combining a brand (which is often a surname) of a famous fashion designer with a product which seemingly does not require such an additional “label” has already become a trend in many highly developed countries, like the USA, as well as in those countries which are recognised as the seat and home to fashion – France and Italy.

When studying the beginning of this trend in the Polish market, we should examine the origin of this phenomenon and its effects in the form of the influence of this trend (combining two brands in consumers’ consciousness) on the image of the studied brands as well as the results they achieve thanks to it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the numerous definitions of “brand”, presenting a holistic approach, describes it as a combination of a physical product, brand name, packaging, advertising and activities related to distribution and pricing which accompany them; as a combination which differentiates the offer of one marketer from competitive offers, which provides consumers with outstanding functional and/or symbolic benefits, thanks to which a loyal group of purchasers is formed and thanks to which it is possible to achieve the leading position in the market (Kall, 2001). As claimed by D. Taylor (2010), the concept of a brand was not created to give consumers “emotional raptures” nor to make them fall in love and establish a long-lasting relationship with washing powder only to make customers’ lives easier and help them to make purchasing

decisions faster (Taylor, 2010). It is difficult to accept such a pragmatic (functional) approach in case of fashion brands. Through their brands, their creators and managers wish to provide much more. They wish to share their worldviews, ideas, lifestyles and, as they stress it in numerous interviews, they wish to provide their customers with the so-called *magic moments* by communing with their brands. It means that in the context of the brand, what is most important to them is their symbolism and “spirit”. The symbolic meaning of the brand or, to put it differently –its expressive properties – is understood as the brand’s ability to express consumers’ moods, their memberships to a given group, their status. Consumers can purchase certain brands in order to communicate something about them to other people. Brands symbolise the image of their owners themselves as well as their personalities, fulfilling at the same time the need to communicate success, achievements, authority or other dimensions of personality (Kall, 2001). Fashion brands are the most accurate example of this description. Since its beginning, fashion has shown the social status and membership to a specific social group. Fur coats, worn in the past by various monarchs, hand-woven attire and jewellery were (and still are) a clear message. Then, while the great fashion houses were established (i.e. *Chanel* or *Dior*), only the richest people could wear attire sewn there (often tailor-made), which still made this brand exclusive and indicated the success of the customers wearing such clothing. Nowadays, in the already mentioned process of luxury democratisation, almost everybody can wear products with the logo of a famous brand.

The fashion market in Poland is still developing. Among the luxury brands, we can find many Polish ones like *Zień*, *Paprocki&Brzozowski*, *Gosia Baczyńska* or *Minge*. What also proves the evolution of this market since the change of the political system in Poland is that the most known Polish chain clothing brand –*Reserved*, owned by LPP S.A. (the owner of such brands as *Cropp*, *House*, *Mohito*), invites the above-mentioned designers to cooperate. An essential element of the development of young brands, not always the luxury ones, is their

presence in social media. Antonina Samecka, a co-originator of one of the greatest street wear brands *Risk Made in Warsaw* compares today's boom in young fashion to the development of advertising agencies in the 90s of the previous century when the intelligent and creative people had their careers as copywriters or creative directors (Kyzioł, Stolarz). Looking for inspirations, interesting styles and fashion world novelties, as many as 44% of Internet users visit fashion blogs (Roguski, 2013).

Despite the period of decline, an average Polish consumer has some financial resources to buy the goods which are not the first need items such as clothing or footwear. This is more often branded medium-priced and high-end clothing, for which Polish people slowly give up wearing non-branded clothing, purchased in small, traditional shops or at the market (Badzińska, 2011). According to the report "Rynek dóbr luksusowych w Polsce 2012" ["The market of luxury goods in Poland 2012"], only every third respondent confirmed that they knew Polish clothing brands which could be regarded as luxury. The most frequently mentioned brand was Vistula and among others were: Wólczanka, Bytom, Ewa Minge, La Mania and Ochnik (KMPG, 2012). The strong position of Polish designers who – being aware of western trends – themselves create the collections of furniture and other interior design accessories under their own name (*Zień Home*, Gosia Baczyńska and Ewa Minge – comprehensive home designs) is evidenced by the fact that they are employed by other brands, known in the interior design market. A good example of the above is the cooperation of Ewa Minge with *Dekorol* brand (PPG Polifarb Cieszyn S.A.) Her achievement is a collection of interior paints. Another example is the line of ceramic tiles produced by Tubądzin Management Group sp. z o.o. designed by Maciej Zień.

The presence of fashion brands in other brands in the world

The transformation of fashionable clothing consumption is a consequence and reflection of social changes which have been taking place for the last century such as the decline of

colonial empires, political ideology-based revolutions, two world wars, economic and environmental catastrophes, artistic movements, design innovations and “the digital age”. This renowned British scholar dealing with the history of fashion claims that fashion was becoming more democratic when next to European designers, the young American talented designers entered this market (Blackman, 2013). At the same time, the goods (including fashion) regarded as “luxury” were becoming a synonym for the word *overpriced*. That would mean the products sold with an exorbitant margin in order to cover the costs of “slick” marketing which accompanied them (Tungate, 2009).

The result of the changes which have taken place within the last 50 years can be seen among others in the so-called today’s “trend carriers” who – in the world of fashion – are not aristocrats but famous and popular people, commonly referred to as “celebrities”. The connection between celebrities and fashion was already noticeable in the past decades when the mass media were called “the fourth power” and the profession of a model changed its dimension from being an anonymous clothing presenter into being a star – a supermodel like Twiggy. At present, when the Internet and social media have dominated the world, the use of popular people as a kind of fashion brand marketing communication carriers is even more visible. Designers sign the collections they create with their names and endorse them with their images. However, for the purpose of marketing communication, they make use of the images of other celebrities – famous actors, musicians or artists. Fashion designers also belong to the group of famous people and their activities are widely covered by the media. Those two assumptions – the already known effect of using famous figures (*brand supporter*) in marketing communication of a given brand and the fact that fashion designers have themselves become celebrities (so they have become potential brand supporters) – have contributed to the fact that their image as well as skills have started to be used in other industries.

Noticing these relations, more and more renowned fashion houses start to extend their brands to cover more and more products, not only those related to clothing industry. A good case in point is *Missoni* fashion brand. The surname of Missoni family, who established their *Missoni Home* in 1981, is known in furnishings industry. (Grużewska, 2013).

Giorgio Armani, as an experienced participant of fashion industry (born in 1934), is one of the most aggressive as far as extending his brand is concerned. Apart from fashion, in its assortment Armani's empire has chocolates, interior design accessories, flowers as well as a luxury hotel in Dubai. In 2007, this renowned fashion designer added the next products to his brand. This time those were electronic devices (among others, mobile phones). This resulted from the cooperation with Samsung Electronics Co. Armani was of the opinion that mobile phones were the logical next step for designers because "the phone that we carry or the TV set which we put in our living room speaks about us as much as shoes we wear or bags we carry or furniture that we have in our apartments" (Meichtry, 2007). The mobile telephone market also offered products endorsed by such fashion designers as *Prada* (LG Electronic Inc.), *Dolce & Gabbana* (Motorola Inc.) or *Versace* (Nokia). The last of the above brands, which began in the form of a fashion show endorsed by Gianni Versace in Milan Art Gallery in 1978, also discovered the possibility of extending its brand and in 1993 it created a unique collection known as "*Home Signature*". This collection includes interior design accessories such as furniture, lighting, textiles, place settings or wallpapers. It is worth stressing that those products are manufactured by other – often renowned – brands, an example being porcelain manufactured by Rosenthal. *Versace* brand is also present in the automobile market having two forms: *Lancia Ypsilon Versus* as well as *Lamborghini Murciélago LP 640 Versace*. In the latter case, each purchased model of this luxury car (the price being approximately EUR 450,000) is accompanied with a set of *Versace* leather accessories, thereby highlighting the designer's brand and intensifying the so-called *magic moments*.

However, like in case of the mobile telephone market, *Versace* is not the only brand having relations with the automobile industry and – as experts in this field claim – the marriage of brands has become a trend in various price categories of this market. Among the leading representatives of the fashion world who have decided to endorse selected car models are: *Dolce & Gabbana* (Citroen C3), *Gucci* (Fiat 500), *Diesel* (Fiat 500), *Sisley* (Fiat Panda), *DSquared* (Mini Cooper), *Pierre Cardin* (Toyota Rav 4). For the customers who look for a sports design car, Volkswagen Golf – in cooperation with *Adidas* brand – has prepared such a version. Apart from the logo of a famous clothing brand, this series had driver's and passenger's seat upholstery presenting the motif of three stripes, characteristic of *Adidas*. It should be emphasised that the French brand of Peugeot already in 1986 offered the 205 *Lacoste* model, which was created in cooperation with a well-known manufacturer of sports clothing.

In September 2013, the automotive brand of Infinity announced that in 2014 they would produce the Infinity Q50 model in the version designed by two American designers: Thom Browne and Zac Posen.

Another designer who extends his brand successfully is Paul Smith. In the documentary about his history (*Paul Smith, Gentleman Designer*, directed by Stephane Carrel, France, 2011), he claims that “inspiration can be found everywhere” and adds and “if someone is unsuccessful, that means that this person has not been searching attentively enough”. This British designer endorses many products, among which there are: a car (Mini Morris), notebook covers with the image of the said Mini Morris, photograph wall paper (designed in cooperation with Maharam) or, like many other fashion houses (*Dolce & Gabbana*, *Marc Jacobs* or even *Chanel*) which – according to the concept of *Corporate Social Responsibility* stress their involvement in ecology – bicycles.

Many clothing brands are solely dedicated to people who practice some sport or who are fond of the sports style (*Adidas* or *Lacoste*). However, it is worth stressing that fashion designers also see the possibility of creating their images by highlighting their presence in the world of sports. An example of such activity is the collection of unique tennis balls designed (in 2012) for the biggest American tennis tournament – US Open – by famous designers like Diane von Furstenberg. Sonia Rykiel created a collection of sports accessories for yoga practice and swimming. Other famous fashion houses which in a particular way have combined their images with sports and have permanently become involved in the development of sports disciplines are: *Benetton*, whose name and logo were present on Formula 1 team's racing cars (from 1986 to 2001) as well as *Louis Vuitton*, whose cup in the race is the most important element of winning the trophy of the America's Cup in yachting.

Another example of combining different brands with the fashion brand and evidence of the presence of such a trend is the activity of Jean Paul Gaultier. Famous for his untypical creations (e.g. the cult corset designed by him and popularised by the celebrity and fashion icon at the same time – Madonna), for Roche Bobois he designed furniture and interior design elements, by means of which he pays tribute to classics, maintaining at the same time the style typical of him (Gruzewska, 2013). However, this is not the only manifestation of his additional activity. Jean Paul Gaultier replaced Karl Lagerfeld (another outstanding fashion designer) in the position of Coca-Cola Light creative director. This designer will be responsible for creating a new advertising campaign and a limited edition of designer bottles and cans.

Another well-known drink brand – *Evian* water – since 2008 has invited for cooperation world-famous designers: limited editions of bottles have already been designed by Paul Smith, Issey Miyake, Jean-Paul Gaultier and Christian Lacroix. The 2013 model was designed by one of the famous ladies of New York fashion scene – Diane von Furstenberg (Tyszkiewicz, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

In December 2013, there was a questionnaire survey, in which 200 respondents participated (they were entering two DIY supermarkets in Wrocław).

They included: 40% of women and 60% of men, aged from 33 to 50.

FINDINGS

In this study, they were asked about the influence of fashion brands used in selected interior design accessories (ceramic tiles and interior paints) on the way of the purchasing decisions they made.

The majority of them – as many as 56% of all the respondents – claim that the brand of a famous designer greatly helped them to make decisions. As the justification of this answer, they said that “they relied on its recommendation”. What is more, in this study, it was also indicated that even more respondents (73%) claimed that the interior design accessories created in cooperation with famous Polish fashion designers were – as the questionnaire participants perceived them – on a lower level of luxury than the products of foreign origin.

Almost a half of the male respondents (25%) declared that they were not the deciding persons while purchasing the interior design goods and they – in unison – pointed to the women in their surroundings who were the decision-makers. What is interesting, all men who pointed to themselves as decision-makers claimed that such combination of brands was a great help for them during the decision-making process.

The use of fashion brands in interior design market

All over the world, managers look for new ways of reaching customers and attracting their attention, among others, by introducing new categories of goods in a given market or taking over new markets. The use of a fashion brand in the interior design industry is a situation, in which for one side, it is just the creation of a new category whereas for the fashion brand, it is

just the entrance into a new market. Thus, the two sides should carry out an analysis of all the elements which may influence the images of both brands and try to examine the image of a common brand (preferably, before it enters the market).

When a company, introducing its brand, takes over a new market, the first thing managers should consider is the benefits the present brand will bring to the new segment of their activity and the costs related to using this brand (Maruca, 2006).

The brands launched into the market may present various types of product categories: a new brand in an existing category, the introduction of an improved product, category extension or the introduction of a totally new product. The decision about the selection of one of the above-mentioned options is conditioned by the selection of brand strategy.

In light of the brand functional concept, the examples of using fashion brands in the Polish market of interior design furnishings, given in this paper, should be classified as belonging to the first category as the introduction of a new paint or new ceramic tiles into the market. However, analysing the so-called “spirit” of a fashion brand, we should again consider this categorisation and re-classify it as category extension – offering the products present in the market (ceramic tiles, paints), which have been given an important feature in the form of a fashion designer’s brand.

The most important issue is giving the brand an image which would explicitly distinguish it from all other brands in any defined product category. The brand must be permanently associated with some added value which would provide consumers with the justification for selecting just this brand. This added value of the brand, determining its otherness in relation to other brands in a category, must be clearly recognisable by consumers so, most of all, it must relate to the properties which are important to consumers in relation to a given product category (Staszyńska, 2013).

Another assumption which should make interior design furnishings companies combine their products with fashion designs is the fact that most frequently the initiators and decision-makers in the process of purchasing such goods are women. It should be emphasised that women are the strongest group of fashion market consumers whereas the most frequent purchasers of interior design accessories, with the transactions most often being conducted in DIY supermarkets, are men.

Brand awareness is the ability of a potential purchaser to recognise the brand or to recollect that it belongs to a given product category (Kłeczek, 2006). So, if the major addressees of marketing communication of a given brand of the interior design industry are women, then – in case of the situation discussed in this paper – the probability that the first element of the definition of brand awareness is fulfilled is high. Moreover, if the receiver expresses the emotional attitude to a given fashion brand, it is more probable that the objective of the interior design brand (making use of the fashion logo)– to remain in this receiver’s consciousness will be achieved.

Another important element in the context of making purchasing decisions is the so-called opinion leaders because it is under their influence that followers-consumers decide to buy the products of certain types and brands as well as to buy goods in specified sales places (Rudnicki, 2012). In case of the issues related to combining the fashion brand with the interior design brand, the name of a famous designer can be an important signpost to all undecided customers (of both sexes) or those who are uncertain of their styles. It is so as – like in case of clothing – aesthetics are the most significant element of interior design.

Unlike the fashion market, the interior design market in Poland is faced with more and more problems. Within the last few years, approximately 130 shops offering such products have been closed. The situation is even worse as there is a strong competition in the form of

large international chain shops. In 2010 and 2011, the market was shrinking by approximately five per cent (wyborcza.biz, 2013).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Today's consumers are looking for the answers to the questions related to the meaning of existence, the confirmation or possibility of shaping their identity, the increase of efficiency and effectiveness in playing important life roles as well as in making their dreams come true. The products that we buy are not the goals but they are instruments and means. We do not buy them for ourselves (this happens only at the level of fundamental functional needs) but for something they represent (Pogorzelski, 2013).

The market of interior design is akin to fashion, which is well manifested in the quoted examples of the employment of famous fashion designers to create goods for this market. It is also characterised by the fact that over the epochs, there have emerged various styles and – like fashion – it is widely available to consumers (not only those most affluent). Like in case of clothing – through the interior design of their apartments, people wish to express their styles, moods and values. Communication serves to make purchasers familiar with a brand and to create bonds between them and this brand. It is thus important that the “hybrid” brand under discussion should carry the values which are shared by both their creators and consumers. It is not easy in case of a single brand; therefore, it is a real challenge when brands are combined. What is important is authenticity. The purchasers' opinion about the reliability of communication is the effect of the activity of many factors and the most important of them is the relation between the brand promise included in marketing announcements and the level of fulfilling this promise by the product in the course of its use (Pogorzelski, 2010).

The manufacturers of interior design accessories are thus made to look for new possibilities and manners of maintaining their market positions. One of them is extending

their brand because fashion – along with the increase in the development of a given country – becomes an essential element of social life. Apart from market reports, this shows a trend, so well observable in the media, of the increasing number of *talent-show* programmes, in which fashion is more and more often the major topic (“*Projektanci na start*” or “*Project Runaway*”) or its presence in social media.

Present for a long time, the relations between fashion and production in many fields have become intensified in a clear way. The questionnaire survey, the results of which have been partly presented above, are rather ambiguous and require further studies in this regard.

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